

# James Hurst's story "The Scarlet Ibis"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It is said that you never really appreciate something fully until it is gone. This is shown in James Hurst's story, "The Scarlet Ibis". This story takes place in the Deep South after World War II, and is told through the eyes of "Brother", one of Hurst's fictional characters. Brother tells the story of his invalid younger brother, Doodle. In "The Scarlet Ibis" normality comes with a price. Brother's pride both helps and hurts Doodle. Brother is ashamed of Doodle's weaknesses.

He always wished for a normal brother: "it was bad enough having an invalid brother, but having one who possibly was not all there was unbearable, so I began to make plans to kill him by smothering him with a pillow" [Pg. 317]. This sentence reveals that Brother didn't try to put in time to shape Doodle into the brother he wanted. Instead, the only thing he did was to make plans to kill Doodle so that he wouldn't have an invalid brother.

"He was a burden in many ways. The doctor had said that he mustn't get too excited, too hot, too cold, or too tired, and that he must always be treated gently. A long list of don'ts went with him, all of which I ignored once we got out of the house. To discourage him coming with me, I'd run with him across the ends of the cotton rows and careen him around corners on two wheels. Sometimes I accidentally turned him over, but he never told Mama" [Pg. 317]. We can see from this excerpt that Doodle looks up to Brother and enjoys spending time with him, however Brother resents being burdened by Doodle and attempts to flip the go-kart Doodle is being transported in so that he will not be burdened by his company when he goes on outdoor excursions. "This is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others)

a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears the seed of our destruction, and at times I was mean to Doodle.

One day I took him up to the barn loft and showed him his casket, telling him how we all had believed he would die. It was covered with a film of Paris Green, sprinkled to kill the rats and screech owls, which had built a nest inside it. Doodle studied the mahogany box for a long time, then said, "It's not mine", "It is", I said. "And before I'll help you down from the loft, you're going to have to touch it [Pg. 318]. This proves that Brother pressurizes Doodle into doing things that Doodle would otherwise not do. An example of this is how Brother uses Doodle's fear of the attic to force him to touch the coffin, a coffin that had been made for Doodle himself, as everyone predicted he would not live very long. Brother's sometimes bullying behavior affected Doodle both physically and emotionally.

Brother's behavior toward Doodle is inconsistent however and he does many good things, too. He helps Doodle become normal and to be able to do things that people thought were impossible for Doodle to do. "When Doodle was five years old, I was embarrassed at having a brother of that age that couldn't walk, so I set out to teach him" [Pg. 318]. This reveals that Brother has compassion for Doodle helping him become the best he can be. Instead of just hiding Doodle at home, which would have been more convenient for him to do, he takes him out in the community. "Once I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own infallibility and I prepared a terrific development program for him, unknown to Mama and Daddy, of course. I would teach him to run, to swim, to climb trees and to fight, he, too, now believed in my infallibility, so we set the deadline for

these accomplishments less than a year away, when, it had been decided, Doodle would start school" [Pg. 320].

This teaches us that Brother wants to aid Doodle in learning and living his life to the fullest possible extent, despite not having the physical and mental abilities that we take for granted. "After we had drifted a long way, I put the oars in place and Doodle rowed back against the tide" [Pg. 322] Brother wants to push Doodle and make him do something, which even by normal standards, would be challenging but even more difficult for Doodle because of his disabilities. These actions show a kinder side to Brother, a side that wishes to help and nurture his brother. Brother's actions towards Doodle are conflicting. Was it better for Doodle to live a short more adventurous life, or was it better for Doodle just to stay at home and never experience life to the fullest.